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SUBJECT: TURKISH AMBASSADOR ON STATE OF PLAY IN
FRANCE-TURKEY RELATIONSHIP

REF: STATE 94204

Classified By: Ambassador Craig Stapleton for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On July 11, Turkish Ambassador Koroturk told the Ambassador that Sarkozy's declared opposition to Turkish EU membership is presenting challenges for French-Turkish relations on a practical level as the French bureaucracy rushes to implement what it interprets as Sarkozy's will, despite Sarkozy's expressed desire to maintain good bilateral relations and not close the door completely on Turkey's accession negotiations. One positive development on the bilateral front is the lack of activity in the French Senate regarding legislation criminalizing denial of the Armenian "genocide." But France's closer ties with Cyprus and decision to allow Cypriot troops to participate in the July 14 Bastille Day celebrations were sources of concern. Koroturk was noncommittal on Sarkozy's proposed Mediterranean Union, citing the lack of detail in the proposal, although he said Turkey would be willing to participate in principle since the Med Union was still compatible with Turkey's EU aspirations. END SUMMARY.

TURKEY-EU RELATIONS

¶2. (C) Koroturk recounted that Sarkozy had made clear to Erdogan following his election that he did not wish his position of opposing Turkish EU membership to interfere with bilateral relations, and that the two leaders had agreed their differences should be kept private. It was during this call that Sarkozy offered to send Jean-David Levitte to Turkey for private consultations, with Levitte arriving in Ankara only two days later. Levitte had assured the Turks that, notwithstanding Sarkozy's opposition to Turkish membership, France would not attempt to put an end to Turkey's accession negotiations. Koruturk said the distinction France was now making between those chapters viewed as implying full membership, and those that could apply to membership or a privileged partnership, was thus all the more disturbing. And this was not an isolated example. He noted that some meetings among EU member country Ambassadors in France and Brussels that had been open in the past to "negotiating countries" (Turkey and Croatia) were now restricted to EU member countries only.

¶3. (C) Elaborating further, Koruturk stated that he was worried about the French bureaucracy's tendency to be more Catholic than the Pope in implementing what it understood to be the day-to-day operational implications of Sarkozy's opposition to Turkish EU membership. The key for the Turks was to buy time to implement the reforms that would eventually bring them up to the same standards as EU member countries. Then, and only then, would it be appropriate for each side -- not only the EU, but also the Turks -- to take a

decision as to whether Turkish EU membership was in its interest. Koruturk unequivocally affirmed that there should be no doubts about Turkey's pro-Western orientation; playing the Iranian or the Syrian card was not an option.

TURKEY-FRANCE RELATIONS

¶ 14. (C) Koruturk noted the damage to the bilateral relationship that had been caused by National Assembly legislation that would criminalize denial of the Armenian "genocide." Saying that he was speaking for U.S. ears only, he indicated that Sarkozy had promised, and the President of the Senate had assured him in confidence, that the legislation would never be taken up by the Senate. In response to a question, Koruturk confirmed that the mil-mil relationship was not yet back to normal, but he attributed that to ongoing wrangling over a Turkish role in EU decision-making rather than differences over the Armenian "genocide" legislation, saying that it was important to find the right balance between NATO country participation in EU decision-making and vice versa. When Levitte had traveled to Turkey, the Turks had compared the French-Turkish relationship to "a three-legged" stool consisting of bilateral, regional, and EU vectors; it was important that all three remain strong.

MEDITERRANEAN UNION

¶ 15. (C) Koruturk said he had been told by Levitte specifically that the Mediterranean Union was not conceived

PARIS 00003080 002 OF 002

as a means of dealing with the Turkish EU question. He affirmed that Turkey was prepared in principle to participate in the initiative, although a decision would be based on how the initiative was fleshed out. He seemed to think that Philippe Seguin, Sarkozy's advisor on economic growth, and Claude Gueant, Secretary General of the Presidency, would be responsible for elaborating the idea.

CYPRUS

¶ 16. (C) Koruturk noted that Turkey had formally protested France's decision to allow (Greek-)Cypriot troops to participate in its July 14 Bastille Day celebrations on the same footing as other EU member states. Citing the Cypriot constitution's mandate for a mixed north-south composition, he complained that there was no such thing as a Cypriot army and that their participation was illegitimate. In response to a question about the status of French-Cypriot relations, Koruturk noted that while France had accepted the Turkish offer of using Turkish ports to stage the evacuation of French citizens from Lebanon, it had shown a preference for using Cyprus and had subsequently signed a military agreement with Cyprus. Although he speculated that the French may have been motivated in part by their rivalry with the British, he was clearly disappointed.

COMMENT

¶ 17. (C) Koroturk was clearly worried that Sarkozy's opposition in principle to Turkish EU membership, while manageable, will encourage a diligent bureaucracy to set up roadblocks in practice that have the potential to do more substantial damage to the bilateral relationship. Koroturk was pragmatic nonetheless about the opportunities for Turkey to continue to reform and harmonize its standards with the EU.

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